NATIONAL PARK SERVICE • U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

Foundation Document Overview

The White House and President's Park

Washington, D.C.

Contact Information

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Purpose

The purpose statements are reprinted from the *Comprehensive Design Plan for the White House and President's Park* (2000).

The purpose of THE WHITE HOUSE *is to:*

- *Provide a residence that offers privacy, protection, and recreational opportunities for the first family.*
- *Provide a suitable location for the official functions and activities of the presidency.*
- *Provide office facilities for the president and immediate staff.*
- *Preserve and interpret the museum character of the White House; provide public access to the principal corridor on the ground floor and to the state rooms on the first floor.*

The purpose of the PRESIDENT'S PARK *is to:*

- *Preserve the cultural resources of the White House—its architecture, artifacts, landscape design, gardens and grounds, and the surrounding parklands—in ways that foster and preserve dignity and respect for the office of the presidency, while still allowing for their use.*
- *Provide a dignified transition area from an urban environment to the White House environs.*
- *Interpret the history and significance of the presidency, the White House, and President's Park, including their relationship to the American public, our republican form of government, and the growth of Washington, D.C.*
- *Preserve existing historic memorials as examples of memorial art.*
- *Provide a large open area associated with the White House for freedom of public expression and assembly activities, as well as for public use and enjoyment.*
- *Protect and enhance views to and from the White House and provide a setting for viewing the White House.*
- *Preserve Lafayette Park as open public space in the foreground of the White House, as a setting for passive activities (reflecting, observing, making a personal connection with the presidency), First Amendment activities within legal limitations, and as a support area for presidential inaugural activities.*
- *Preserve and interpret Lafayette Park as one element of the oldest planned federal reservation in the nation, an example of early American landscape design, and the 19th century neighborhood of the president.*
- *Provide a setting for viewing the White House and elements of the Lafayette Square National Historic Landmark District.*

Significance

Significance statements express why The White House and President's Park resources and values are important enough to merit national park unit designation. Statements of significance describe why an area is important within a global, national, regional, and systemwide context. These statements are linked to the purpose of the park unit, and are supported by data, research, and consensus. Significance statements describe the distinctive nature of the park and inform management decisions, focusing efforts on preserving and protecting the most important resources and values of the park unit.

The following significance statements are reprinted from the *Comprehensive Design Plan for the White House and President's Park* (2000).

The White House is significant as the official residence and office of every U.S. president and his family except George Washington. It is the only official residence of a head of state in the world that is regularly open to the public free of charge. The White House is also an extraordinary museum comprising rare and fine arts, furnishings, and objects—many of which are associated with past presidents, making it possible for people to come in direct contact with our nation's history.

The White House is the oldest federally built building in Washington, D.C., and it is one of the foremost examples of the 18th century architecture and stone carving in the United States. The White House also serves as a sustaining focal point for an important historic neighborhood.

The White House is a symbol of the power and authority of the U.S. presidency, the center of the executive branch of government, and the focus of diplomatic relations with other countries. As such, the White House is the setting for interactions between the public and the president, as well as between the president and other heads of state. To many the White House is a symbol of a free and democratic nation because it is accessible and open, as is the ideal of the democratic process. Its endurance for over 200 years reflects the stability of our nation. As a result, the White House evokes an extraordinary range and depth of emotions among U.S. citizens and visitors from other cultures and countries.

President's Park reflects the growth of the presidency, as well as the evolving social and cultural experiences of our nation. The park is the oldest federal reservation in the nation, and it is a nationally significant historic landscape that continues to reflect the design principles of Pierre Charles L'Enfant in 1791, Andrew Jackson Downing in 1851, and the Olmsted brothers in the 1930s—design principles that have withstood the test of time. President's Park is integral to the historic layout of the city, which was initially designed to physically represent the functional relationships of the three branches of our government. Memorials that have been incorporated into the historic landscape design commemorate significant events and individuals in the nation's history. The White House grounds contain commemorative plantings by presidents and first ladies.

The White House and President's Park contain valuable open space in the center of a densely urban environment. This space is available for use by the president, the first family, and the public. The surrounding President's Park also allows for public access and assembly close to the White House, and it serves as a national and even international stage for the expression of First Amendment rights and for U.S. citizens to petition their government.

Lafayette Square National Historic Landmark District, which includes adjacent buildings, represents the president's neighborhood; its function, landscape design, architecture, and social purpose as a place for people to gather are historically significant.

As a focus of national events for over 200 years, The White House grounds and President's Park contain important historic archeological resources relating to the history of the American presidency and to the history of Washington, D.C.

Fundamental Resources and Values

Fundamental resources and values are those features, systems, processes, experiences, stories, scenes, sounds, smells, or other attributes determined to merit primary consideration during planning and management processes because they are essential to achieving the purpose of the park and maintaining its significance.

- **The White House and the Wings.** The White House is the oldest public building in the District of Columbia and has been the home and office of every president of the United States except for George Washington. The White House, including its wings, serves as the residence of the first family, offices for the president and staff, and an evolving museum. A number of state rooms are used for a variety of functions from presidential staff meetings to formal dinners honoring visiting dignitaries. While the White House itself has expanded since its original construction, it remains relatively unaltered and its design and architecture continue to serve as a symbol of a stable nation.

The White House and President's Park comprise three distinct cultural landscapes that are each fundamental to the park and provide the setting for the "President's Park" as defined by Pierre L'Enfant in 1791.

- **Lafayette Park.** Lafayette Park to the north of the White House is a 19th-century public park redesigned in the 1960s. The park is bounded by H Street to the north, Madison Place to the east, Pennsylvania Avenue to the south, and Jackson Place to the west. Two brick elliptical paths bisected by two brick parallel straight walkways inscribe the rectangular park. Elliptical fountains accent the east-west line of the park. Monuments to Revolutionary War heroes (Marquis Gilbert de Lafayette, Comte Jean de Rochambeau, Tadeusz Kosciuszko, and Baron Frederich Wilhelm von Steuben) anchor the corners, and an equestrian statue honoring President Jackson in the War of 1812 sits in the center of the park. Two 19th-century urns, known as the Navy Urns, flank the south central entrance to Lafayette Park.

- **White House Grounds.** The White House grounds cultural landscape consists of the gardens and grounds within the iron fence line of the White House that provide privacy, protection, and recreation for the first family as well as the backdrop for official events. The grounds were originally designed by Thomas Jefferson and have evolved through designs by Andrew Jackson Downing and Frederick Law Olmsted, Jr. as well as others. The north grounds consist of a semi-circular drive arching around a circular fountain centered on the house. Groves of trees, many commemorative, flank the drive to the east and west. The south grounds consist of a circular drive reached by a tangential road on the south with entrances at the east and west end. A circular fountain, centered on the house, is located further south of the drive. Groves of trees and bushes, many commemorative, flank the east and west sides of the south lawn.

- **The Ellipse (President's Park South)**. The Ellipse area, or President's Park South, to the south of the White House grounds is another important cultural landscape. President's Park South consists of the rectangular park area known as the Ellipse, Sherman Park to the northeast, and First Division to the northwest. An elliptical roadway serves as the centerpiece of the Ellipse with narrow curved roads, referred to as dog legs, in the northeast, southeast, and southwest corners. President's Park South is ringed with a series of monuments and memorials that include: the First Division Monument, the Zero Milestone, General William T. Sherman Statue, the Boy Scout Commemorative Tribute, and the Second Division Memorial. The park also is significant for its views to and from the National Mall, Washington Monument, and Jefferson Memorial.

- **Visitor Experience and Access for the Public.** A distinctive feature of the White House that sets it apart from the official residences of other heads of state is that members of the public are provided opportunities to access the building. The White House Grounds serves as the setting for special events such as the White House Garden Tours and the White House Easter Egg Roll. President's Park also provides the public with important recreational opportunities as well as special events such as the National Christmas Tree Lighting. The National Park Service plays a key role in providing access, interpretation, education, and other visitor experiences for the public.

- **First Amendment Access and Opportunities.** The importance of the White House as a national symbol of our democracy becomes most evident as individuals and groups choose to associate themselves with this symbol, while exercising their First Amendment right to free speech. The National Park Service recognizes that First Amendment activities are central to the symbolic nature of this location, and provides for these activities while ensuring the protection of cultural and natural resources at the site. Traditionally, access and proximity to the White House have made Pennsylvania Avenue and Lafayette Park on the north side of the White House the most appropriate place for demonstrations. However, larger groups also gather on the south side, using the Ellipse as a staging area.

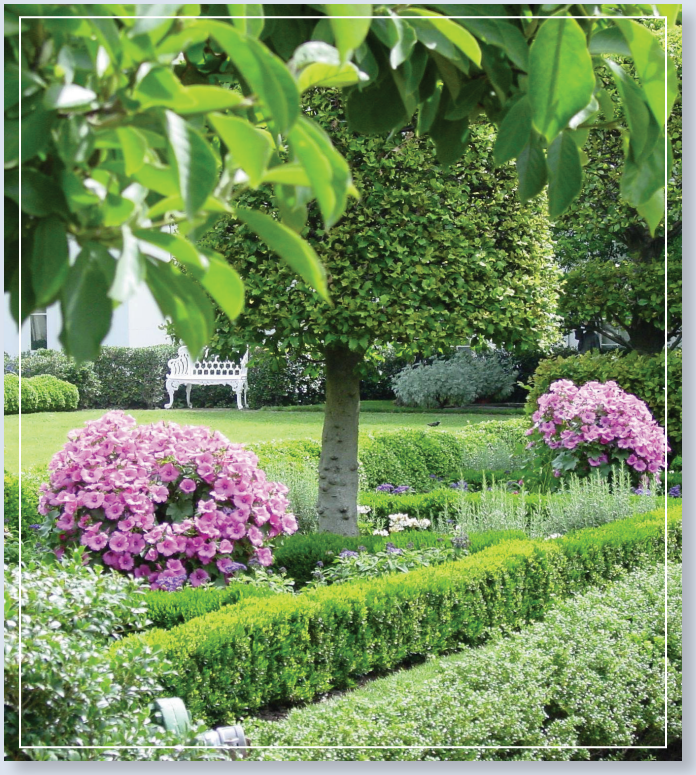
- **Continually Making History.** The White House and President's Park are exceptional historic sites because they represent an ongoing historical period that began in 1792 when George Washington selected James Hoban to design the White House, and continues today. The White House is where the president holds meetings that decide national and international policy and signs new legislation. The first family has a profound influence on the trends of American culture. American and foreign citizens, dignitaries, and cultural leaders are all among visitors to the White House; each new day brings with it the possibility for the White House and President's Park to bear witness to defining moments of history on a national or world scale.

- **Museum Collections.** The museum collections and archives for the White House and President's Park provide a tangible connection to the legacy of the presidency and the history of the White House. The National Park Service assists the White House Office of the Curator with the management and stewardship responsibilities for an extensive collection of artifacts and objects associated with presidents and their residency at the White House. The museum collection includes historic American and European furnishings and fine art and archives that continue to grow with each administration. Through exhibits and displays at the White House Visitor Center, pieces from the museum collections are made accessible to the public and provide unique interpretive opportunities to connect visitors to the presidency.

- **Views and Vistas.** Views and vistas were among the most important features of the first plan of Washington, D.C., drawn by Pierre Charles L'Enfant in 1791. Situated on a high point within the city, the White House is a focal point on the principal north-south axis of L'Enfant's plan. Perhaps the most important view associated with the site is the long vista linking the White House, Washington Monument, and Jefferson Memorial. The National Park Service has worked assiduously to maintain this iconic corridor between these preeminent sites. The axial relationship is clearly evident and remains one of the defining attributes for the entirety of Washington, D.C.'s, monumental core. Other significant vistas include views north from the First Division Monument to the Eisenhower Executive Office Building and south to E Street, the view from Sherman Park north to the Treasury Building, the view from Constitution Avenue north to the Second Division Memorial, and the view to and from the North Portico across Lafayette Park and up 16th Street.

- **Symbol of Democracy.** The White House is a symbol of the presidency, of a free democratic society, and through its continuity, of the stability of our nation. As the preeminent symbol of a stable democracy in an ever-changing world, the White House has come to represent democracy for all the world's citizens, and its occupants serve as the voice of democratic ideals. The continuity of this image is reinforced by, and in great part derived from, the peaceful transfer of power, from George Washington to the present.

Other Important Resources and Values



The White House and President's Park contain other resources and values that may not be fundamental to the purpose and significance of the park, but are important to consider in management and planning decisions. These are referred to as other important resources and values.

The White House and President's Park has the following other important resources and values:

- **Archeological Resources.** The grounds in and around President's Park and the White House contain rich archeological resources that are likely to yield important data and information about the history and development of the site and surrounding cityscape. Since the first cornerstone was laid in 1792 the White House and landscape have evolved over the years. Numerous archeological resources have been found and documented throughout President's Park and the White House grounds. Archeological resources are witnesses to this evolution and provide a unique window into understanding the White House, its residents, and the surrounding growth of Washington, D.C.

- **Other Distinctive Landscape Features.** Because of its role as a national symbol, many landscape features, memorials, and monuments have been added to the site throughout its history that are not necessarily associated with its historic period of significance or the landscape originally envisioned by its designers. Many of these features, including the Ellipse Visitor Pavilion, have been constructed to serve visitor needs. Other memorials with historic significance that add to the overall character of the site include the Butt-Millet Memorial Fountain, the Bulfinch Gatehouses, the Original Patentees of the District of Columbia Memorial, and the Ellipse Meridian Stone. These monuments, memorials, and distinctive features further distinguish the landscape and in some cases serve as the anchors for annual commemorative events. Other features that are not directly contributing to the historic significance of the site include the Haupt Fountains, the Lafayette Park Lodge House, and the Bernard Baruch Bench of Inspiration.

Interpretive Themes

Interpretive themes are often described as the key stories or concepts that visitors should understand after visiting a park—they define the most important ideas or concepts communicated to visitors about a park unit. Themes are derived from—and should reflect—park purpose, significance, resources, and values. The set of interpretive themes is complete when it provides the structure necessary for park staff to develop opportunities for visitors to explore and relate to all of the park significances and fundamental resources and values.

The following interpretive themes originated from the *Comprehensive Design Plan for the White House and President's Park* (2000), and were reorganized and expanded upon in the *Long Range Interpretive Plan* (2007).

1. The primary function of the White House is to be the home of the president and the president's family.

Owned by the American people, this world-class museum, historic site, and public stage is, foremost, the home of the presidential family. Regarded and administered as a house and not a palace, the White House represents the American ideal of "family" and "home"—a home in which normal family events take place: weddings, births, deaths, and other family milestones.

The White House has been the residence of every American president except George Washington, who chose its location and supervised its construction. The privilege of occupying the mansion is granted by the American people, and the routine succession of its inhabitants is a reaffirmation of the ideals of American democracy.

As the home of presidents, the White House must serve the needs of the presidential family, just as any American home serves its occupants. It must offer these active families opportunities for privacy, protection, and recreation. This is increasingly difficult in this very public house. The White House is the only official residence of a head of state that is regularly open to the public free of charge. Additionally, the White House must serve the president as the location for official and ceremonial functions, many of which convey national and international significance. The nation's front yard is the president's backyard.

The struggle to maintain privacy in this "fishbowl" is intensified by the public's fascination with the private lives of presidential families, both past and present. The prospect of "looking through the keyholes" at life behind the public scene presents opportunities for glimpses of presidents and their families that reveal their personalities and characters. Personal family touches—pictures, pets, etc.—heighten the connections to an interested public. For the informed observer, evidence can be found throughout the mansion and grounds that provide windows into the lives of past presidents and the use of the White House over time.

1a. The responses of presidents and first ladies to the challenges of the presidency provide important lessons in their varying capabilities to handle their job.

Almost immediately upon occupying the White House, presidents and first ladies often are viewed as heroes of the American culture. The so-called "honeymoon period" at the outset of each new administration is evidence of America's willingness to see a president succeed. Yet, only with a historical perspective can an administration be judged as successful or a president's career as exceptional.

Presidents and first ladies come from all walks of life. Some were perceived as great leaders, both political and inspirational, long before ascending to the presidency. Others were virtual unknowns who achieved greatness through their deeds while occupying the White House. Some failed to live up to the public's expectations at that time, only to have history appraise their administrations as distinguished.

The political climate and exigencies of the period can significantly influence the character of the presidency and the perceived greatness of a president. Would Abraham Lincoln be exalted among American presidents if there had been no Civil War to challenge him to monumental deeds? Would Lyndon Johnson's Great Society program have placed him on the same level if there had not been the ordeal of the Vietnam War?

First ladies, too, have frequently risen from positions of unsung supporters of their husbands to positions of national influence. The importance of the role of first lady and her ability to make a significant national impact has grown slowly, with the reluctant acceptance by the American people of women in public life. How many potentially great first ladies had to suppress their aspirations or remain hidden behind their husbands? Equally, how many potentially great presidents were never given the opportunity because they were people of color or other minorities?

The perception of greatness is a fluid balance between the realities of the daily challenges demanded by the job and the illusions generated by the aura of the presidency. This perception is enhanced not only by the deeds of these famous men and women, but also by the very symbolism of the White House itself. Presidents and first ladies have clearly used this symbolism to further their personal and public aspirations, all the while hoping to leave a permanent legacy for the American culture.

1b. Many people from different backgrounds and cultures have been essential in the growth and operation of the White House as the home and office of the president.

The story of the White House and President's Park cannot be told without accounting for the many people behind the scenes that have made it all possible. Frequently, the impacts and contributions of these people have been little understood by the American public.

Few people realize that the original laborers and stonecutters constructing the White House were African American slaves hired from their masters. Many other cultures were represented at the construction site; most of the crews were composed of emigrant skilled workers and indentured laborers. As an example of this cultural diversity, the planner of the federal city was French, the designer of the President's House was Irish, and the stonemasons were Scottish.

From cooks to plumbers to U.S. Secret Service agents, a look behind the scenes at today's White House illustrates the diversity of people and professions who come together to make the site work. Permanent residence staff that continue from one administration to the next work closely with special assistants who serve a particular president. Business as usual at the White House may have its routine, but it is never ordinary, for there is a mystique and a special pride to working at the White House. That pride is evident whenever a member of the staff describes the manner in which they serve the president.

2. The White House is the seat of the executive branch of government.

From its inception, the White House has been the primary office of the president, in addition to serving as his home and more recently as a museum. The power associated with the White House emanates from this function as the Executive Office of the President. This is the place where people come in direct contact with their highest elected representative. This is the platform from which the president communicates with the world, using the powerful symbolism of the White House to achieve desired behavior and actions. Simply hearing the words "Oval Office" conjures up all the authority and power of the presidency.

The evolution of location and size of the president's office and executive support staff tells the story of the growth in the power of both the United States and its chief executive. Significant in this story is the development of the West Wing and the Oval Office. Also figuring prominently are the immediately adjacent Eisenhower Executive Office Building and the Treasury Building, as well as their predecessors, the original State, Treasury, War, and Navy buildings. Together these buildings concentrated and defined the power of the president. Today, proximity to the White House is perceived as an expression of executive authority.

Within the White House complex many different government agencies and public institutions must co-exist to serve the president and the public, while preserving the integrity of the White House. Most visible among these is the role played by the news organizations in keeping the connections open between the public and the president.

The White House roles as office and home are most clearly integrated during the many official functions held on the site. Receiving and entertaining guests at the White House serves as one of the president's most powerful tools in communicating with the world.

In addition to serving as the office of the president, the White House serves as the office of the first lady. The development of this function, from a primarily social function to one of administrative importance, chronicles the growth in the public influence of the first lady.

2a. The White House is a symbol of the presidency, of a free democratic society, and through its continuity, of the stability of our nation.

As the preeminent symbol of a stable democracy in an ever-changing world, the White House has come to represent democracy for all the world's citizens, and its occupants serve as the voice of democratic ideals. The continuity of this image is reinforced by, and in great part derived from, the peaceful transfer of power, from George Washington to the present.

As the embodiment of our nation's point of view, the White House is the world's focal point for people to express their views. The story of First Amendment expressions at the White House is a narrative of our nation's changing perspectives and the diversity of opinions held by its citizens. Here individuals learn that through the legal process of petitioning the government they have the power to make a difference. Many also learn that there are costs and rewards for taking an unpopular stand.

President's Park provides a critical role in the right of peaceful protest and petition before the White House. People feel safe and protected as they speak their views at this site. This right is carefully preserved, along with public access to the White House, and is symbolic of our commitment to democracy. Free public access to the White House has been a unique privilege since 1801, a privilege not accorded in other countries.

Although the White House and President's Park continue to evolve to meet the changing needs of the president, efforts are made to maintain the symbolic stability of the site by perpetuating its architectural and landscape integrity. This integrity provides ever-present evidence of the continuity of our ideals and the enduring opportunity for all people to reach out to their leaders.

3. The White House is a mirror and magnifier of the nation's cultural, recreational, political, and topical history.

Throughout its history, the White House has reflected, enhanced, and influenced the nation's events and phenomena in a variety of subject areas.

The people of the world look to the White House for expressions of our collective American cultural identity. Presidents throughout the years have attempted to represent and showcase the many cultures that make up American society. This cultural diversity is represented in historical and present-day expressions of the arts, crafts, entertainment, and foods of the United States and the world.

As the premiere American family, the lifestyles of the presidential family exert a great influence on the trends of American culture. The foods, music, and entertainment at White House dinners, both public and private, hold a great fascination for the public and are extensively reported in the news media. Fashions worn at the White House reveal the nation's social and economic climate and are widely imitated for popular use. Foods eaten or not eaten by the president can influence the tastes of people nationwide. Thomas Jefferson's White House macaroni dinners, Ronald Reagan's penchant for jelly beans, George Bush's dislike for broccoli—each has had its influence on the populace. The dining habits of the presidential family can confirm trends, such as the recent shift to healthier cuisines or the past elimination of alcoholic beverages. Equally, the recreational pursuits of the president confirm and set trends in American leisure activities.

Venerated as an icon of the American way of life, the White House has taken on a nearly sacred status in the American psyche. Events of great consequence—both sad and joyful—spontaneously draw large numbers of people to the White House to share in a collective experience.

3a. The White House is an example of the continuum of history—through its architecture, stories, decorative, and fine arts.

The White House is an extraordinary living museum whose collections of rare and fine art, furnishings, and objects, many of which are associated with presidents and their families, make it possible for people to come into direct physical and emotional contact with our nation's history.

The White House has served as a showcase for the best of America, beginning with an exhibition by Thomas Jefferson of objects collected on the Lewis and Clark expedition. Today the White House contains one of the best decorative and fine arts collections in the United States. The careful observer can detect the changes in values and attitudes of different presidential families through the changes in the use of artifacts and decorations.

But what makes the White House truly extraordinary is that it is the only museum in the world in which history is made daily. It is this aspect that makes a visit to the state rooms so exceptional; the rooms in which visitors stand during morning tours are the same rooms where history-making events may take place later in the day.

Echoes of the personalities that shaped our history—their aspirations and political beliefs—and the events that took place here can still be found throughout the White House. John Adams's prayer carved on the mantel of the State Dining Room is an obvious example. Many older visitors to the Diplomatic Reception Room can still hear Franklin D. Roosevelt addressing the nation during his fireside chats. The magic of rolling Easter eggs on the White House lawn is probably much the same today as it was for the first egg rollers in 1879.

If the White House is a capsulated version of American history, then the stories of the men and women who have produced this institution are the stories of America itself. Many were powerful and well-known. Others have labored in obscurity, performing essential tasks. Through the discovery of their stories and the legacy of their material culture, we discover ourselves.

4. President's Park, as a primary element of the nation's capital city, serves as a stage for active participation in the democratic process, and is linked by Pennsylvania Avenue—America's main street—to the legislative and judicial processes on Capitol Hill.

The significance of the White House and President's Park can be more fully appreciated and understood when viewed in the context of its cultural landscape. Based firmly on 19th century landscape concepts, the physical relationships embodied in the design and layout of the District of Columbia illustrate the foundation of the American form of democracy—the divisions and connections of power between the three branches of government. The evolution of plans for the federal city, from its original design by Pierre Charles L'Enfant to its present configuration, represent the ongoing evolution of government and philosophically differing points of view regarding the separation of powers. Throughout the development of the federal city, the White House has remained a pivotal element of the L'Enfant plan. The open spaces of President's Park serve as the focal point of the hopes, moods, and concerns of the local community, the nation, and the international community. These spaces also serve as oases for local residents and visitors seeking quiet and recreation in an urban setting, perceptibly enhanced by its proximity to this greatest of American houses. Special events and First Amendment activities all take on a greater relevancy and sense of excitement in the shadow of the White House.

As the District of Columbia has grown around it, the continuity of the President's Park landscape, its relationship with the other federal government buildings, and its continued public access symbolize the stability of our government, the growth in prestige of the office of presidency, and the long heritage of all peoples of the country.

4a. The stability of the design and architecture of the White House and President's Park is a product of continuing attempts at adaptation to changing needs and technology.

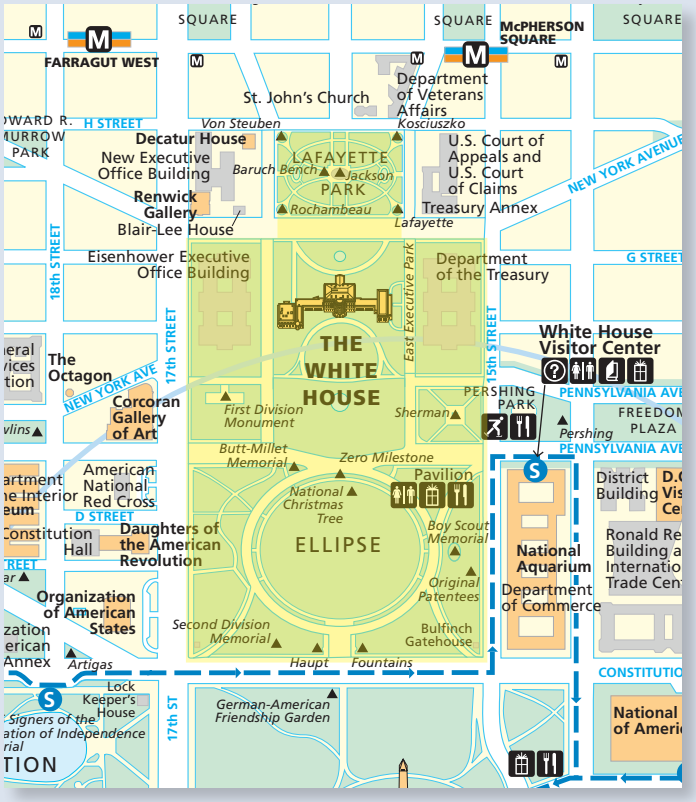
Originally a product of 18th century design, the White House and President's Park exhibit over two centuries of borrowed traditions and American ideals. Employing European models, the original planners and designers—George Washington, Pierre Charles L'Enfant, and James Hoban—created a distinctly American mansion that reflected the mentality of its builders, as well as that of the nation at that time. The resulting building is still thought to be one of the finest examples of American architecture and craftsmanship.

Even though the house and grounds were designed to serve all foreseeable needs of the presidency, it was not long before modifications were introduced to address the needs and attitudes of its changing occupants. These are dramatically illustrated by the work of Thomas Jefferson, whose building additions and landscape alterations created a more functional and "republican" estate. Over time, greenhouses have been built and removed, wings have been added and modified, gardens and recreation spaces have evolved according to the vision of the presidential family. Presidents continue to affect the landscape of the White House grounds through the planting of commemorative trees. Many technological improvements have been added. Each change has built upon the legacy of the past and has helped ensure a livable, workable complex capable of meeting the needs of the president and the agencies that serve and protect him. Most of the modern changes to the White House complex have occurred in the wings and basements and are not readily visible to the public.

The White House has reflected the personality of each presidential family, mirroring their style of public and private life, as well as their political sensibilities. Yet through all this the White House has remained remarkably stable in appearance. Great care has been taken to maintain its historic image, each president respecting the historical associations of the mansion. As a result, the White House has retained its traditional appearance, much of its furnishings and decor, and even many of the memorabilia of its occupants. A stable White House is a symbol for a stable nation. This symbolism is, perhaps, no better illustrated than President Madison's decision to rebuild the mansion in nearly its exact form after its burning in 1814.

The landscape of President's Park has undergone substantive modifications, yet it too has remained virtually the same since the late 19th century. The other two major buildings of President's Park, the Treasury Building and the Eisenhower Executive Office Building, illustrate the changing fashion of American architecture and the growing power of the U.S. government. Many of the changes in the park landscape reflect the evolution of public use and conceptions of open spaces, and the perspectives of the American people. Memorials throughout President's Park evidence the nature of U.S. heroes. Lawns that once supported Union troops are now the scene for impromptu ball games. These same spaces must also serve as stages for presidential ceremonies, First Amendment demonstrations, and special events. Stability through flexibility is the keynote of President's Park and the White House.

Description



1600 Pennsylvania Avenue is arguably the most famous address in the United States, and the White House one of the most recognized residences in the world. Every president except George Washington has called the White House home and has run the executive branch of the United States Government from within its walls. Because of this functional role, the White House and surrounding President's Park are a focal point on the landscape of the nation's capital. For over 200 years, the White House and President's Park have grown both physically and symbolically, representing both the democracy and the resiliency of the United States of America.

When George Washington and Pierre L'Enfant laid out President's Park in 1791, they envisioned it as the setting for the White House and the centerpiece of the new capital. Covering 82 acres from H Street to Constitution Avenue between 15th and 17th Streets, the site was the first parcel acquired for the federal city and is still listed as "Reservation Number 1" in the land records of the District of Columbia. White House construction began on October 13, 1792, with John and Abigail Adams becoming its first residents in 1800.

Designed in the style of a classic Georgian manor house, the White House suffered fire damage in 1814 during the War of 1812 and was rebuilt in 1817. After years of use, adaptation, and expansion the White House went through significant restoration and structural stabilization during the Truman administration (1945–1953). As the nation grew, so too have the White House and President's Park, along with their significant role in shaping both the nation's capital as well as our national consciousness.

As a key element of the L'Enfant Plan, President's Park not only provides the setting for the White House but also functions as an important public space within Washington, D.C. President's Park includes Lafayette Park, the Ellipse and its side panels, the First Division Monument, and Sherman Park. Many national monuments and memorials are also found throughout the park, illustrating the significant role of President's Park as a symbolic location on the urban landscape of the nation's capital. President's Park sits next to the National Mall and is visually connected to the Jefferson Memorial, the Washington Monument, and the United States Capitol. Because of its prominent location, President's Park functions as the site of numerous public events and gatherings, such as the National Christmas Tree lighting.

The White House and President's Park serve as a private residence, the executive office of the president, a military installation, a museum, a public park, and a national shrine. Given these multiple roles and functions, it is not surprising that numerous federal agencies work in collaboration to administer and manage the White House and President's Park. The Executive Office of the President, Executive Residence at the White House, U.S. Secret Service, and General Services Administration, are among the agencies with whom the National Park Service works to ensure both the preservation and use of one of the most recognized houses in the world.